**The Play**

**-"Death of a Salesman** is a tragedy about the differences between a New York family's dreams and the reality of their lives. The play is a scathing critique of the American Dream and of the competitive, materialistic American society of the late 1940s."  
-"When the play version appeared on Broadway, it was a total hit. It won Arthur Miller the Pulitzer Prize in 1949...Death of a Salesman is widely considered even to this day to be one of the greatest American plays ever written."  
-"Death of a Salesman is often considered an attack on the American Dream...In 2004, [surveys](http://usgovinfo.about.com/od/moneymatters/a/baddream.htm" \t "_blank) found one-third of Americans adamantly insisting they were not living the American Dream, with half of them saying it wasn’t even attainable for them."  
-"What has the American Dream come to mean, anyway? For Willy Loman, it was popularity and demeanor. For many of us, it’s a big-screen TV and a [BMW] in the garage. The bigger question is what we’re sacrificing for this big, glittery dream. 'Success' starts being a relative term. You’re only successful if you’re more successful than other people you know; your car is only sexy if it’s sexier than the one next door.  
-So try to read Death of a Salesman with this in mind: if the American Dream isn’t working, or if it has shifted to the point where success is no longer equated with happiness, what’s the point? Or, if you know anything about Indie rock, please apply the following [Metric lyrics](http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/metric/handshakes.html" \t "_blank): 'Buy this car to drive to work; drive to work to pay for this car.'"

**The Work** (to understand the play)  
--Complete the study guide questions for each Act.  
--Also, keep a journal/log of your text evidence and responses to the following questions (related to subjects/themes of the play) as you read the play:

***Note:*** *choose any THREE of the following five.*  
**(1)*Lies and Deceit***:  
What characters deceive themselves or others? How do they do this (find specific text examples)? Why do they do this?  
Which characters fight against this deceit? How do they do this (find specific text examples)?  
**(2)The American Dream:**  
*Find evidence to support the following arguments:*  
--By directly linking his sense of self-worth to the achievement of the American Dream, Willy’s professional failure becomes personal failure and a crisis of identity.  
--Biff’s struggle in Death of a Salesman is primarily one of separating his sense of self-worth from his professional life.  
**(3)*Dreams/Hopes/Illusion***:  
*Support or refute the following statement:*  
Dreams function purely as a form of self-deception in Death of a Salesman.  
**(4)*Success:***  
*Support or refute:* Willy’s obsession with obtaining concrete evidence of success distracts him from recognizing the important intangibles in his life, particularly the love of his family members.  
**(5)*Pride:***  
*Support or refute:* Willie Loman's greatest flaw is his pride.

**Find text evidence/appearances relating to the following symbols/motifs: (choose 3)**

-Seeds -Stockings -Alaska/The West/Africa

-The title of the play (Death of a Salesman). What's the meaning(s) of the title?

*Also, respond to the following:*  
***Is Willie Loman a tragic hero or just a pathetic man?***  
Aristotle defines a tragic hero with the following five characteristics:  
-a tragic hero must evoke in the audience a sense of pity or fear  
-the hero must be "virtous...a morally blameless man."  
-the hero is one "who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty." In other words, he/she possesses a tragic flaw.  
-the hero must be the one who commits the error or wrong that brings about his own downfall  
-the hero must be "highly renowned and prosperous" (often royalty).